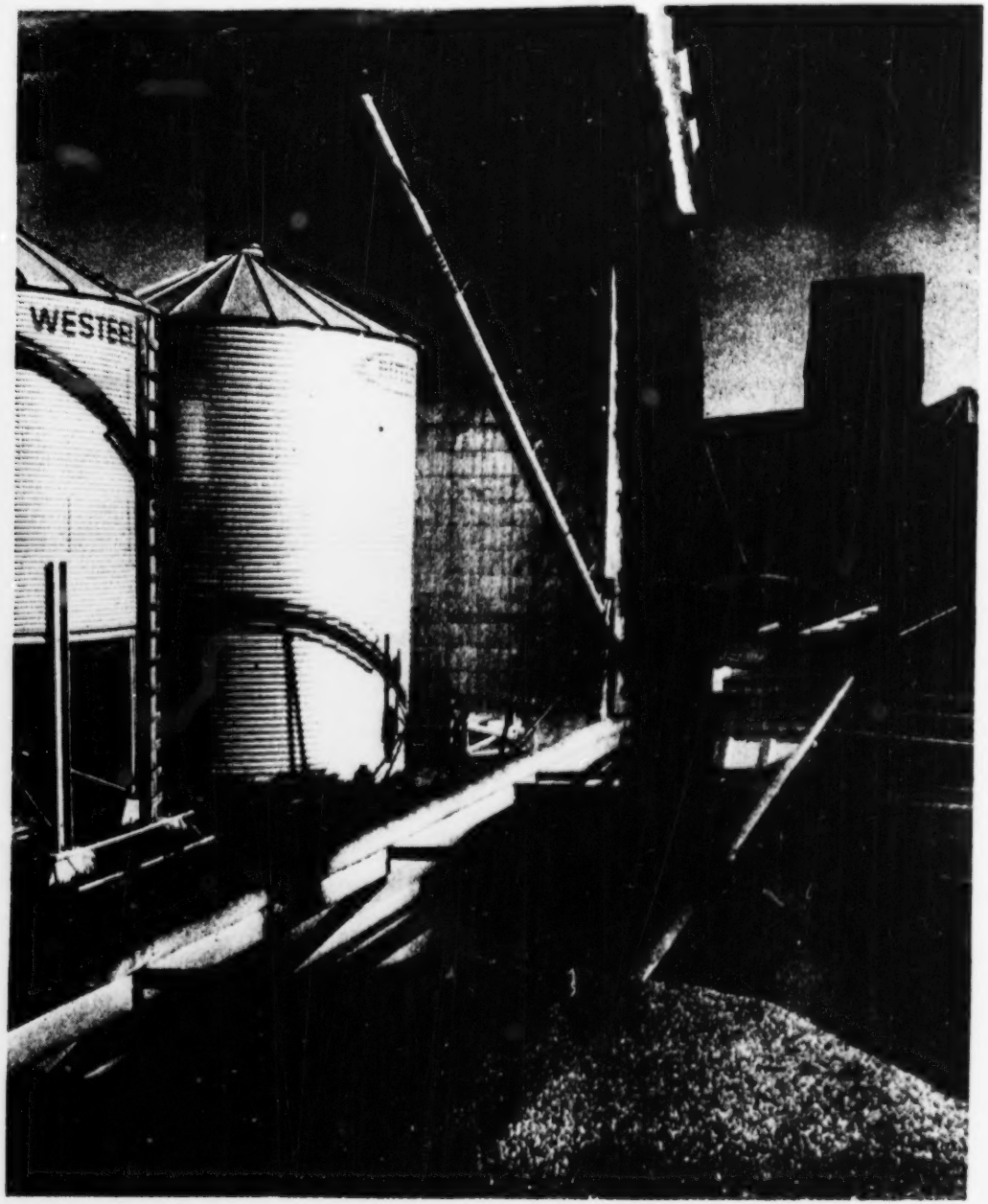


growth strategies

Report of the
New Democrat
Official Opposition
Task Force
on the
Family Farm
and the
Future of Rural Alberta

April, 1987

Table of Contents

Summary 2

Foreword 3

Agriculture Today 5
- The Crisis in Agriculture 7
- The Changing Face of Rural Alberta 8
- Measuring Farm Efficiency 8
- Family Farms in Alberta 10
- The Role of Government 10

Options 13
- Farm Finances 14
- Marketing and Transportation 20
- Agricultural Research 23
- Family Life 24
- Land and Resource Use 25
- Rural-Urban Co-operation 26

Recommendations 29
- Addressing the Financial Crisis 30
- Farm Debt 31
- Alberta Farmland Trust 31
- Improving the Farm Economy 32
- Marketing and Transportation 33
- Agricultural Research 33
- Rural Family Life 34
- Further Discussion 34

Notes 35

Public Hearings 37

Task Force Members 42

2
Summary

In August, 1986, the New Democrat Official Opposition formed a special Task Force to investigate the state of agriculture in Alberta, and to make proposals for the future health of that industry.

The Task Force, called **Growth Strategies**: *The New Democrat Official Opposition Task Force on the Family Farm and the Future of Rural Alberta*, spent October and November touring the province, listening to concerned individuals and organizations in a series of twenty public hearings. In addition, the Task Force received a number of written briefs.

In all, 151 oral and written briefs were presented to the Task Force, dealing with all aspects of Alberta agriculture. This report summarizes the main points brought up in these briefs, and presents some recommendations which the Task Force believes could help maintain a vital and healthy rural economy and social environment.

The Task Force is particularly concerned with the importance of supporting small- and medium-scale farms, particularly family farms, which provide the basis for rural society and the farm economy. The Task Force found no evidence that large-scale farming provides any significant economic benefits, and identified a number of potential social and economic problems which could result from the continued trend toward large-scale production.

Major recommendations of the Task Force include:

- A moratorium on farm foreclosures, and the establishment of an improved debt mediation process;
- The formation of an Alberta Farmland Trust;
- Further investigation of farm income security and parity-pricing programs;
- The development of rural-based social policies, including child-care and social services specifically targetted at farm families.

The Task Force believes continued discussion of these issues is needed, and hopes this report will help stimulate such discussion.

Foreword

Derek Fox, MLA
Task Force Chairperson

The New Democrat Official Opposition recognizes the importance of agriculture to Alberta. We are concerned about the current state of the industry, where it is headed, where it ought to be headed, and what government can do to aid the development of an agricultural industry that will support a rewarding way of life for farm families and other rural residents and that will maintain a healthy rural economy.

In October, 1986, the New Democrat Official Opposition formed a Task Force to inquire into agriculture in Alberta and the future of Alberta's rural communities. From October 27 until November 14, 1986, the Task Force held a series of twenty public hearings around the province, to hear what Albertans had to say about these issues.

As chairperson of the Task Force, I would like to thank the other members of the Task Force and the many people behind the scenes who provided organizational support, the citizens of the communities which provided such excellent facilities for our hearings, and the hundreds of rural and urban Albertans who attended the public hearings. I wish to extend a special thank you to all those who took the time and great effort to present written or oral briefs to the Task Force. These thoughtful briefs and many excellent comments were greatly appreciated and helped provide the framework for this report.

The Task Force received over 150 briefs, reflecting the great diversity of opinion amongst Albertans. In this report, we wish to present these opinions as objectively as possible, in order to stimulate discussion of these important issues. We wish also to present those proposals which, in our view, form the basis for a positive strategy for continued development of agriculture in Alberta. These recommendations,

which conclude this report, represent the collective views of the Task Force, and do not necessarily represent the views of each individual Task Force member.

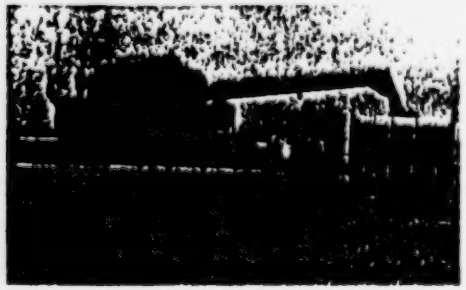
It is a continuing challenge to find new approaches to the complex issues which face agriculture in the 1980s, and it seems clear that the **Growth Strategies** Task Force is only the first of many steps. While many questions were answered during the the public hearings, many other questions remain unanswered. New questions were formulated, and important issues were brought forward that demand additional attention. The other members of the Task Force and I look forward to a continuing dialogue on agricultural issues with rural and urban citizens so that together we may build a better future for all Albertans.

Derek Fox, MLA
Chairperson
April, 1987

5

Agriculture Today

Agriculture Today



Why do we produce food in Alberta? What do we hope to achieve by so doing? How shall we go about it?

Many historic, geographic, economic, social and political factors influence the way these questions are answered. In addition, each individual holds unique opinions and possesses distinct personal aspirations. It is therefore not surprising the Task Force detected a great diversity among Alberta citizens; our collective goals are broad and difficult to define, and these goals often conflict.

Very broadly, the general goals of agriculture in Alberta are to:[1,2]

1. produce responsible and humane citizens;
2. provide a continuing way of life for these citizens which supports intellectual, spiritual, commercial and leisure pursuits consistent with accepted standards of human rights;[3]
3. provide adequate supplies of nutritious food at affordable and stable prices.
4. provide producers of food with stable and reasonable returns for their labour and investment;
5. provide a reliable base for economic growth, increased real incomes and the collection of public revenues as taxes;
6. provide goods and services which can be sold on the world market to generate a consistent source of foreign exchange;
7. provide citizens steady and satisfying employment;
8. ensure equitable distribution of income;
9. ensure broad equality of opportunity in this and other societies;
10. minimize environmental degradation resulting from agricultural activity.

Too often, during periods of crisis or difficulty, a perception evolves that positive action is futile or impossible, that there are few options, and that some goals must be postponed or even forgotten. Members of the Task Force believe that during such times it becomes even more important to keep discussing the central goals of agriculture and how they may best be met.

Conflicts between goals should be expected, and should not be ignored; members of the Task Force strongly believe such conflicts should be examined carefully, and not simply resolved in favour of the most powerful and influential members of society. They believe these goals of agriculture must be discussed and debated openly, so that conflicts can be resolved democratically in the best interest of all Alberta citizens.

7
Agriculture Today

The importance of this task cannot be overstated.

To a very large extent, modern Alberta society is based on an agricultural heritage. While many Albertans are no longer actively engaged in agriculture, almost all of us have some link to the farm. Many of our cultural and social institutions are based on a rural culture, a culture of co-operation and hard work.

Although it is no longer dominant, agriculture is still a key sector of Alberta's economy. In 1986, total farm cash receipts were $3.8 billion. Of this sum, nearly $1.8 billion represented sales of wheat, canola, barley and many other crops including potatoes, flowers and nursery crops, vegetables, sugar beets, oats, flaxseed and rye. Cattle and calves provided farmers with $1.2 billion, while hogs, dairy products, poultry, eggs, sheep, lambs and other products made up another $0.7 billion.[4]

Agriculture is the foundation for many other Albertan industries. Although farm-gate sales of crops and livestock contributed only 5.0% of the provincial domestic product in 1982,[5] it is estimated that each dollar of farm sales generates over six dollars in overall economic activity.[6]

Alberta farmers provide a huge market for the construction industry, machinery and parts manufacturers, petroleum products, refiners and distributors, fertilizer and agricultural chemical companies, feed suppliers, finance, insurance and real estate agents, storage, transportation and utility companies and for the wholesale and retail trade. In 1986, Alberta farmers spent nearly $2.4 billion on these agricultural inputs.[7]

The importance of agriculture in the provincial economy is underlined by the estimate that one out of three Albertans depends on agriculture for his or her pay cheque.[8]

Agriculture also contributes to interprovincial and international trade. Over $3 billion in agricultural products left Alberta in 1985,[9] of which more than half were sold outside the country.[10]

The province clearly has a large stake in maintaining a healthy agricultural system, from the perspective of providing employment, maintaining provincial income, supplying tax revenue, providing worthwhile opportunities for private and public investment, and maintaining the social fabric of the province.

The Crisis in Agriculture

One message was emphasized repeatedly and emphatically in session after session of the public hearings. Farmers, consumers, business-people, commodity organizations, municipal and town officials — citizens from all parts of Alberta — warned that agriculture is facing its worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. While a significant number of farms are still financially secure, many producers have been forced to leave the industry and many more are in severe financial difficulty. Virtually all presenters to the Task Force agreed that these financial difficulties are not the result of poor farm management, but rather were mainly caused by forces beyond the control of individual farmers.

Many of our younger and most productive farmers are being forced off their land because they had the serious misfortune of entering farming at the wrong time. Other producers accepted the best advice then available, including advice from the Government of Alberta, and expanded their operations just before interest rates soared to record highs and

"It is something far more than farm management that is causing this crisis."
— Grande Prairie

"If the farmer is smiling, the merchant in town is smiling."
— Vermilion

8
Agriculture Today

**"I don't see bankers committing suicide."
— Boyle**

commodity prices plummeted, driving down the value of their land and other assets. It is ironic that at the same time as younger farmers are forced to leave farms they want desperately to keep, many older, experienced producers are forced to keep their land and continue farming because they simply can't afford to stop.

Although accurate statistics are hard to obtain, it is estimated that more than 30% of those Alberta farmers with more than $20,000 in gross annual sales are in moderate to severe financial difficulty.[11] More than 20% of Alberta's Farm Credit Corporation (FCC) loans are in arrears[12] and the Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation (AADC), the provincial lending agency, now holds more than 560 quarter sections of land that farmers have been forced to give up.[13]

**"There used to be a farm-house on every quarter-section. Now you can drive for five or six miles before you pass a farm-house."
— Red Deer**

The agricultural crisis doesn't stop at the farm gate. It extends throughout rural Alberta, affecting machinery dealers, restaurants, stores of all kinds, financial institutions, and local tax-supported services. As the rural economy declines, so does the overall economy of Alberta. It seems clear that we must work together to preserve our rural economy in order to ensure the well-being of all Albertans.

The Changing Face of Rural Alberta

One striking trend in provincial agriculture has been the shift toward larger farms. The number of farms in this province declined from nearly 100,000 in 1941 to only 58,000 in 1981 — a decline of more than 40% in 40 years.[14,15] During the same period, the average size of Alberta farms nearly doubled from 434 acres to 840 acres, while the capital requirements increased from around $7,000 to more than $630,000 in constant (1941) dollars per farm.[16]

**"I'd like to have a neighbour that I could have tea with."
— Boyle**

Larger-scale farming has led to a sharp decline in the number of people living and working on farms. This decline in farm population leads in turn to even greater decreases in the population of rural communities, and then to more expensive and reduced services, including transportation, education, health and income security.

It has also had a dramatic effect on the social fabric of rural Alberta. The Task Force received many emotional accounts of families being forced to leave their homes; of intense loneliness as, family by family, neighbours move off; of the grim speculation about year-to-year survival of existing farms.

Large-scale farmers frequently obtain credit and purchase supplies and equipment from large dealers in distant centres, in order to take advantage of economies of scale. As a result, local retailers lose business, forcing them to increase prices or reduce services, which then encourages other farmers to shop further afield. Through this negative spiral, the number of retail merchants and other small businesses in the rural community also declines.

Frequently, we hear that the trend to larger farms is due mainly to their increased efficiency, relative to moderate-sized or small farms. Large-scale farms certainly *seem* efficient. But we must ask, what exactly is efficiency, and are large-scale farms actually more efficient than smaller farms when all factors are taken into consideration?

Measuring Farm Efficiency

Efficiency, according to the *Dictionary of Canadian Economics*, may be defined as:

9
Agriculture Today

"There is more to life than cost accounting."
— Lethbridge

> The most effective use or allocation of resources to yield the maximum benefits — for example, the lowest possible costs, or the satisfaction of the greatest number of people.[17]

Since agriculture consists of complex social, economic and ecological systems using many inputs to produce a variety of outputs, no single index can describe adequately the efficiency of a particular farm operation.[18] For example, easily quantifiable outputs such as crop yield or profit can be considered in terms of the amounts of such diverse inputs as fertilizers, labour, capital, land, water and energy.

Many indices of efficiency, such as crop yield/acre, crop yield/hours of work, profit/acre and profit/capital outlay (return on investment) are all relevant in describing a farm operation. Some indices, such as satisfaction/hours of work, or crop yield/tonnes of top soil eroded, are equally relevant but not so easily measured, and generally receive less attention.

It is not possible for a farmers to maximize all indices of efficiency at the same time, just as it is impossible for a car driver to maximize both speed and gas mileage during a trip. For example, the large-scale use of expensive inputs such as fertilizers and other chemicals may increase crop yield, while decreasing profit. In addition, low grain prices and high production costs make it painfully clear that large crop yields do not guarantee large profits. Any one farm will inevitably be efficient in some respects but inefficient in others.

Profitability

Efficiency is often measured in strictly financial terms as dollars of gross income per dollar of input cost. Input cost can be reduced by buying fuel, fertilizer, machinery or credit in large amounts and hence at cheaper rates, and it is generally agreed that large-scale farmers can benefit from these economies of scale. Similarly, the increased marketing power that often comes with bulk selling can increase revenue. What is rarely appreciated, however, is that most moderate-sized farms are also large enough to take advantage of these economies of scale.[19,20,21] In terms of gross income per input cost, most large-scale farms are no more efficient than moderate-sized farms,[22,23,24,25] and many are less efficient.[26]

Rate of profit may be less relevant to an individual farmer than absolute profit. In one sense, it is more efficient for a hypothetical farmer to achieve an output of $12,000 from an input of $10,000 than it is to receive an output of $23,000 from an input of $20,000. In the first instance, every input dollar yields $1.20, whereas every dollar in the second instance yields only $1.15. However, in terms of profit, most farmers would prefer the latter situation, since it yields $3,000 overall compared with only $2,000. It is therefore not surprising that efficiency is often thought of as equivalent to profitability.

It must be remembered, of course, that this measure of efficiency does not take into account the use of capital, land degradation, quality of life or many other important social, political and economic factors. When these things are considered, it becomes clear that maximizing profit cannot be the sole end of agricultural policy.

Farm Survival

Some argue that the obvious trend towards larger-scale farms itself demonstrates that large farms are more efficient. In this argument, 'efficiency' is even more restrictively defined, as "the ability of a farm to survive current conditions." Rather than

being useful, this appears to be little more than an attempt to justify existing political and economic trends.[27]

Rural Well-Being

If efficiency is defined in terms of the social goal of maintaining farm population, rural population and viable rural communities, then large farms must be considered as less efficient. While trends vary from region to region,[28] several studies have indicated that rural communities surrounded by moderate-scale farms generally have "a larger business community [and] more diversified and stable employment opportunities" than do towns surrounded by very large farms.[29] These economically-diversified communities provide good opportunities for off-farm employment if desired by residents. Not only can greater total income apparently be generated,[30] there are also indications that income and power are more evenly distributed amongst the population in communities surrounded by moderate-scale farms.[31,32,33,34]

"The family farm is central to our vision of efficient and sustainable agriculture."
— Edmonton

In supporting the economy of the local community, moderate-scale farms also enhance greatly the social well-being of all rural residents. As well as more retail outlets in these town, there are also more schools, churchs, hospitals, community centres, parks, playgrounds, post offices, newspapers, and civic and social organizations. Every member of the rural community has more neighbours, which leads to more shared ideas, less loneliness and more child-care options. In short, compared with very large-scale farms, moderate-scale farms are much more likely to provide substantial economic and social support for all of the surrounding residents.

"After losing thousands of farmers in the past number of years, are we any better off?"
— Grande Prairie

Family Farms in Alberta

Moderate-scale farms in Alberta are generally family farms — farms in which the production and marketing decisions are made by the family which operates the farm and in which that family interacts with the community and provides most of the required labour.

The role and definition of family farms provoked a great deal of discussion during the Task Force hearings. There emerged a broad agreement that the institution of the family farm generally enhances such important values as shared responsibility, co-operation, personal initiative, perseverance, patience, and individual freedom and responsibility, as well as serving to help preserve and reinforce the structure of family units. Family farms are thus seen not merely as economic units, but also as important social units.

Promoting family farms as social and economic units is not, as some critics charge, unrealistic nostalgia. As many presenters pointed out, farming families change with the society around them, but it generally makes sense for public policy to stress the 'family' aspect of these farms rather than focussing solely on the agricultural commodities they produce.

From this perspective, the development of policies based on farm families will help provide the foundation for a future Alberta that is not only more economically efficient and resilient, but which is more likely to provide every citizen the vast benefits of an enriching and satisfying society.

The Role of Government

Some people strongly feel there should be no government assistance to Alberta food producers. Any such assistance, they say, only "extends the length of time needed for correction" to market forces.[35]

Some even go so far as to suggest the market is such that Canada should quit agriculture in general,

and family farming in particular, in the name of economic efficiency.[16]

One may wonder which forces these people are considering! Is it:

- the precipitous drop in grain prices due to the deliberate actions of foreign governments attempting to gain a greater share of the world market?
- the exorbitant interest rates, at levels until recently prohibited by federal law?
- the successive years of poor conditions for growing and harvesting crops in many regions of the province?

Whatever name these forces are given, most observers predict that economic difficulties will likely persist for several years. As a result, presenters to the Task Force agreed overwhelmingly that suggestions to 'do nothing' invite disaster for a vital sector of Alberta's economy. A forceful case can be made that the abandonment of family farms and the economy of rural communities would be an abdication of duty of a responsible government elected to serve the interests of its citizens.

Government currently plays an important role in agriculture, to the benefit of both producers and consumers. There are many valuable programs supported by government, including:

- trade and tariff measures;
- trade promotion and market development;
- extension and information services;
- research;
- farm financing;
- commodity stabilization plans;
- crop insurance.

In recognition of the current financial crisis, the federal government recently announced a $1 billion payment to producers. The provincial government, for its part, now provides selected farmers with fixed-interest loans at 9% interest. While these programs were sorely needed and are a significant commitment to the industry, most observers agree that they do little to address the main causes: widespread financial problems which will likely get worse before they get better.

Although it is generally agreed that governments ought to assist farmers, there is considerable disagreement how this can best be accomplished. Many people who spoke to the Task Force were concerned that government programs may not be equitable to all producers and may encourage trends in agriculture which could be dangerous in the long term.

Many past government programs have tended to reinforce and even extend the trend towards increasing farm size.

During the boom years of the late 1970s and early 1980s, government officials, financial institutions, producers and consumers shared expectations which we can now clearly see were unrealistic. The expectation of nearly unlimited markets fueled a rapid expansion in agricultural production, and lead to huge increases in land price. While some producers resisted the temptation to expand, others reluctantly accepted huge debt loads at record high interest rates to 'gear up' for what they thought would be good times ahead.

Basic government support programs gave producers more confidence in their ability to repay loans and thus encouraged expansion. The existence of these programs also made it easier for financial institutions to provide the credit required for expansion.[17]

11
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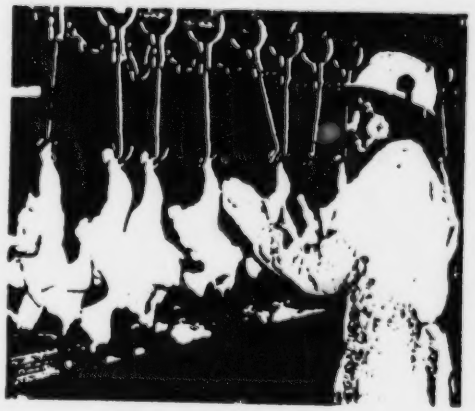


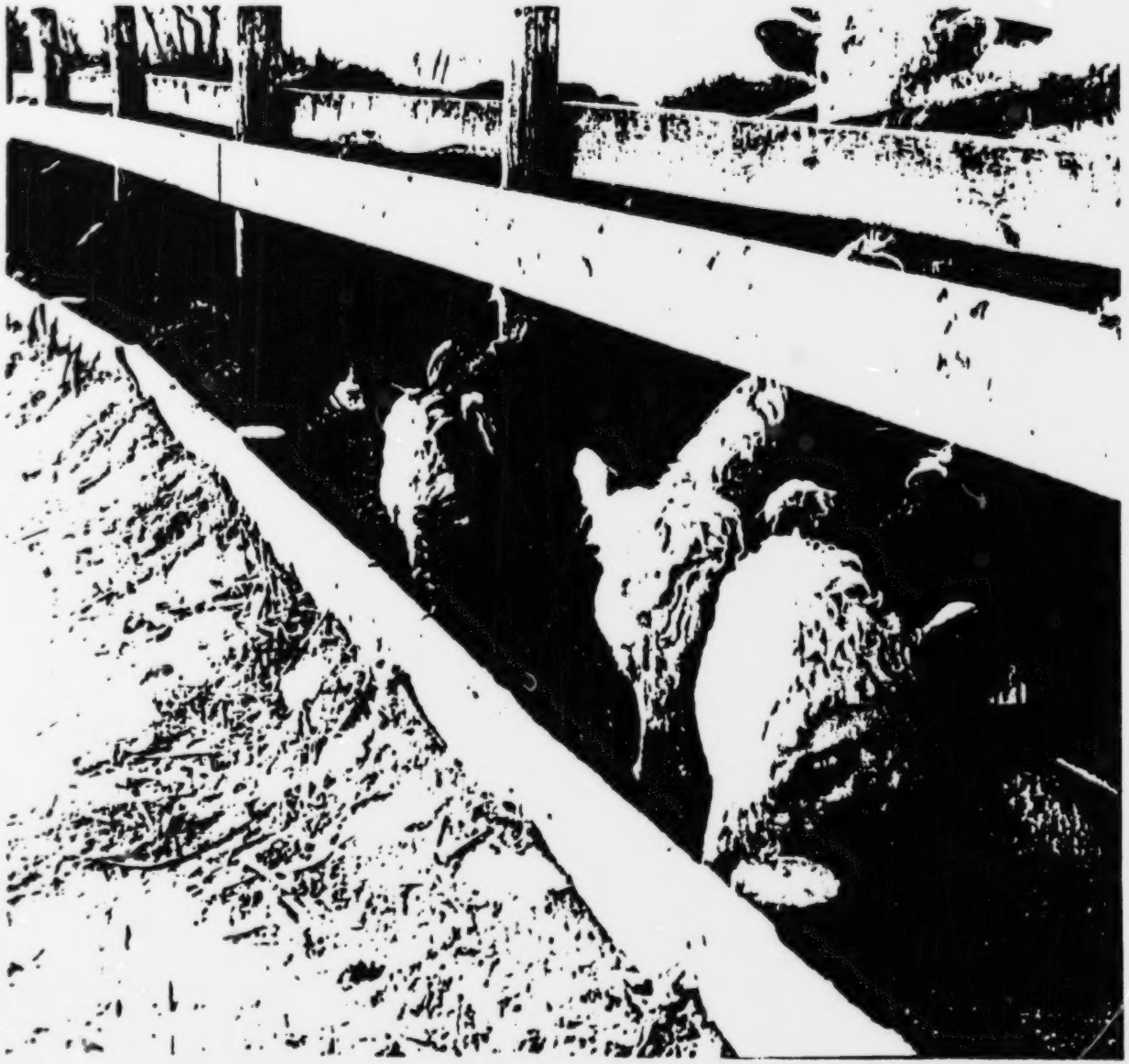
"Farmers cannot be asked any longer to fight foreign treasuries out of their own pockets — it cannot be done."
— Camrose

12
Agriculture Today

"Any farmer would rather get what they feel their product is worth than have to beg and borrow from the government." — Lethbridge

Many government programs have provided other, perhaps more subtle, pressures on smaller-scale farms. For example, government assistance programs which base payment solely on yield, land area or number of animals benefit large-scale producers more than smaller-scale producers, an effect reinforced if minimum production levels are a prerequisite for assistance. It is widely felt, as well, that research and extension programs frequently concentrate on providing assistance for large-scale farming. Numerous taxation programs also promote larger farms over smaller farms, and promote expansion of existing farms at the time of purchase.[38] Finally, it seems very likely that many macro-economic policies of governments which affect currency values, inflation, and, especially, interest rates have also played an important role in reinforcing the long-standing trend toward increasing farm size.[39]

In response to the current crisis, many producers rely on government-sponsored assistance, but only with extreme reluctance. As the Task Force heard many times, most producers believe such assistance should not be necessary, that it can be counter-productive, that it is often poorly-targetted and dispensed inaccurately, and that it is frequently designed more to achieve partisian political ends than to improve the long-term health of rural Alberta.



13

Options

"It's absolutely crucial that something be done within the next twelve months or lots of my neighbours and friends will not be around next year."
— Camrose

Options

There is no question that immediate action must be taken if agriculture is to remain a vital part of Alberta society.

In the past two years, the prices of several major commodities have dropped precipitously in the face of shrinking international markets and a major international trade war, leaving most farmers with returns woefully inadequate to meet their financial obligations. At the same time, the decrease in agricultural land value threatens the basis of farm loan portfolios which financial institutions considered solid only a few years ago.

Many producers expressed to the Task Force feelings of resentment and frustration in the face of the bitter consequences of a situation over which they have little or no control. A great number of producers have already gone bankrupt, losing not just a business but a way of life. Many others face severe financial difficulties, or wonder how long they can continue to operate in the current financial climate.

Members of the Task Force detected a feeling of near helplessness or grim resignation in many submissions. Pervading most of the submissions was a sense of desperation, that something must be done right away to reverse the trend toward larger farms, to encourage small- or moderate-sized operations, and thus to stimulate the rural economy.

However, what individual producers cannot do, Albertans working together can accomplish. Many innovative and carefully-thought-out suggestions were brought forward to the Task Force. These are reviewed and summarized in the following pages.

Farm Finances

Many producers told the Task Force that domestic consumers would simply have to pay more for food to ensure a viable agricultural industry in Alberta. As was often pointed out, Canadians pay less per person for their food than citizens of nearly all other industrialized nations, even when special payment and subsidy programs are taken into account. It was also pointed out that only a small fraction of the amount consumers pay for food is actually returned to the producer.

There was broad consensus that members of the general public often hold mistaken perceptions of the amount of assistance producers receive, and do not fully appreciate the important role agriculture plays in the economy. Moreover, it was commonly felt that consumers do not realize that failing to react to the current crisis could lead to substantial shifts in the structure of the industry, and to both higher food prices and even greater payment to former farmers as social assistance. Some presenters described efforts of organizations to which they belong to educate school children and adult urban dwellers about agriculture.

15
Options

"The horse that does the work doesn't get the oats."
— Stettler

"All we ask is a reasonable standard of living."
— Manning

Additional efforts of this form were seen to be vitally important.

One means suggested to achieve greater returns to producers is a parity-pricing system, which would ensure farmers receive a price equal to or greater than their cost of production, roughly balancing the prices of agricultural and non-agricultural products. Such a plan was in place in the United States until shortly after World War II.

Also suggested was a limited parity pricing plan, which would guarantee producers a price at least equal to their average cost of production for only the first portion or 'unit' of the commodity they deliver.

An income insurance plan for producers, such as is now in place in British Columbia, was also suggested, as were a graduated floor price and an inflated domestic price.

The concept of a universal deficiency payment to offset low grain prices received enthusiastic support, but there was considerable disagreement about how such payments could best be dispensed. Some concern was raised that such a payment could have the unfortunate effect of reinforcing the very trend toward large-scale agriculture which many people find so disturbing. In addition, there was discussion about how much money was needed, with estimates ranging from $1 billion to $5 billion, and about how much tax-payers would be willing to spend in the future.

A few people suggested decreased production could result in higher net returns. This could be achieved by restricting the number of new products, or by introducing tax concessions for land taken out of production as was done under the recent LIFT program.

Orderly marketing was also discussed as a method of increasing producers' returns. This is considered below.

These and other suggestions generally provoked wide-ranging discussion on the relative importance of agriculture on the domestic and international markets. Although increasing the price for domestically-produced food generally received favourable comment, many observers and presenters were quick to point out that most agricultural production is exported and that our domestic population is relatively small. As a result, any domestic program which could completely alleviate hardship resulting from low prices for exports would be extraordinarily expensive. Therefore, many presenters emphasized the great importance of pursuing international trading agreements to end the current trade war.

Members of the Task Force felt that aspects of all of these suggestions warrant further investigation in detail.

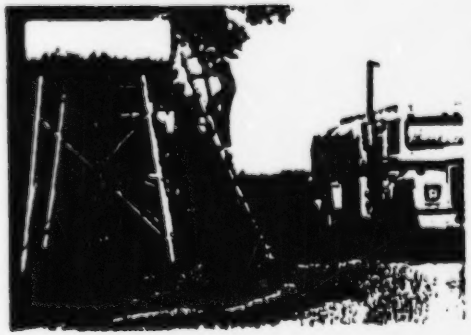
Reducing Production Costs

Alberta does not have enough influence on international markets to single-handedly raise world prices. However, we could also benefit by lowering production costs.

One strategy would be to minimize the number and amounts of costly inputs. We could, for example, expand research efforts to develop suitable strains of perennial grains to reduce cultivation costs. Many existing techniques, if encouraged, would also have the same beneficial effects. For example, using green manures and nitrogen-fixing legumes in crop rotations can enrich the soil and provide large crop yields at minimal costs.

Another strategy would be to change to a different, less intensive farming system altogether. For example, marginal agricultural land could be used for

16
Options



"In 1985, these little plastic discs for my seed drill sold at 86¢ each. This spring they cost $4.67 each and I have the bill to prove it."
— Vermilion

"We've been brainwashed to use more fertilizer to squeeze out the last bushel or two out of our land."
— Red Deer

grazing cattle rather than for growing grain or other crops which require large amounts of expensive inputs and have uncertain markets. This would not only be less costly but also less damaging to the environment than many current practices. Soil degradation is a real threat to the longer-term viability of agriculture and some producers expressed strong frustration at being forced to adopt unwise farming practices in order to maintain the short-term economic viability of their farms.

Reducing the amounts of inputs used on farms is only one way of reducing the costs of production. Another strategy is to reduce the costs of such direct inputs as feed, fertilizer, farm chemicals and fuel. This approach was recommended by many producers. For example, since taxes add significantly to the costs of these inputs, it was frequently suggested not only that rebates on farm inputs be extended, but also that it would be more effective and less costly for governments to abolish taxes on these inputs altogether. This could result in substantial decreases in the actual cost to producers of fuel, fertilizer, and farm chemicals.

Energy costs are a major farm expense. Some producers indicated that they should be able to obtain natural gas for drying grain at the well-head price, while others suggested decreasing the cost of electricity.

Electricity is, of course, a major cost to many farmers. Some suggested prices could best be reduced through public ownership of utility companies, which could then supply electric power at cost. An important immediate step would be to halt the takeover of many user-owned Rural Electrification Associations (REAs) by private power companies. These private companies are perceived to have considerable influence with the current provincial government.

The cost of electricity is much higher in Alberta than it is in B.C. and Alberta electricity costs have recently increased dramatically, leading some to suggest a consumer advocate should be placed on the Public Utilities Board to serve as a representative for farmers and other consumers.

Many producers mentioned that land taxes add significantly to their costs, and suggested these taxes be based more closely on the productive value of agricultural land or upon gross returns, rather than upon appraised land value. Some objected to paying substantial land taxes at all, feeling that taxes on income were a much more suitable means for governments to derive income.

Some tax concessions were seen to benefit a few individuals at considerable expense to others. For example, it was indicated that tax advantages that favour investment in agricultural land can increase land prices for farmers and so should be abolished. Similarly, tax write-offs for agricultural losses were attacked for favouring wealthy investors.

On the other hand, it was suggested that it should be possible to extend current tax roll-over provisions to include farm transfers to apprentice farmers and to more distant family relatives.

Allowing the establishment of trust accounts for farmers, similar to RRSPs, was suggested as a means not only of reducing year-to-year income variations, but also of reducing the cost of production by reducing taxes.

Several producers indicated that allowing agricultural chemical companies to produce so-called generic farm chemicals would greatly reduce their cost. It was also pointed out that grain-drying co-operatives could provide substantial savings to producers.

A few producers suggested lowering input costs by decreasing wages of producers of agricultural inputs and of workers who store, transport and market farm products. This approach was condemned by others as unfair and, since lower wages decrease consumers' purchasing power, as counter-productive.

Interest Rates

Since interest payments are one of the largest input costs for Alberta producers, and since the provincial government had recently initiated an interest rate reduction program, it is not surprising that interest rates received a large amount of attention at the public hearings. Most people agreed that government assistance to lower interest rates was both useful and necessary. Many also agreed that the Farm Credit Stability Program (FCSP) served that purpose reasonably well. However, a number of flaws in that program were identified, and it appears the FCSP could have been better designed to be more helpful to producers.

Many producers feel that much of the FCSP money was given to preferred customers and did not assist those most in need. The requirement for producers to obtain expensive independent appraisals was also criticized for preventing many people taking advantage of the program. Some producers indicated that the program's $200,000 limit had a similar effect, while others objected to a substantial portion of the money being used to pay private financial lending institutions for administering the program.

The program's 9% interest rate was criticized as being too high, although some presenters cautioned that interest rates should be kept higher than the inflation rate to provide incentives for future borrowing. Several producers pointed out that charging excessively high interest rates was once prevented by law, and others called for broader government involvement in setting interest rates as occurred immediately after World War II.

Other suggestions for extending assistance to producers included providing similar government programs to members of Metis Settlements, restricting assistance to producers who receive financial training, and ensuring that both interest and principal are amortized. The concept of basing loan repayments on the price of commodities, which has been instituted by the federal government's Commodity Based Loan program, also received support.

Many presenters to the Task Force indicated that a strong commitment to family farming is needed to keep farm families on their land and to ensure their economic survival in the longer term. There was also broad agreement that governments, financial institutions and producers share responsibility for the current crisis in agriculture and that all three groups must work together to solve it for the benefit of all Albertans.

Although interest rate protection and other similar programs were recognized as helpful, they do not address the main causes of the current difficulties. If current trends continue, these programs alone will not prevent a large percentage of Alberta's most productive farm families being forced from the industry by circumstances largely beyond their control. Some producers expressed serious concern that consumers could react against *ad hoc* programs in the future which were both extremely costly and not particularly effective. What is needed, they indicated, is an examination of less conventional ways of financing family farms, no matter how difficult this examination may initially seem politically.

Several presenters suggested a vendor financing plan for Alberta. Under this plan, individuals and retiring farmers who are willing to accept a low return

17
Options

"We won't survive even with the 9% loan program — but it certainly will help the banks."
— Barrhead

**"If you want agriculture as we know it stick around, you have to do something major."
— Manning**

would receive government loan guarantees in exchange for selling their operation to beginning farmers at below market interest rates.

It is probably an indication of the seriousness of the crisis that this simple proposal did not receive more attention. Many presenters seemed much more concerned about the economic survival of their farms during the next several years than about considering mechanisms for transferring their farms to relatives who, not surprisingly, do not feel they can afford to begin farming even at preferential interest rates.

Debt Adjustment

**"Banks are always being bailed out — why not farmers?"
— Manning**

Although there was broad support for provincial government intervention to provide interest rate reduction, there were many different opinions about extending government involvement to write down or defer farm debts. Some people argued that the cost of credit to all farmers would be increased and that such a program would only serve to protect inefficient farmers. Others argued that existing Farm Debt Review Boards had not been given adequate power and so were not preventing a mass exodus from rural areas. Such an exodus could and should be prevented by forcing financial institutions to accept a fair share of responsibility by accepting debt write-downs or deferments.

Members of the Task Force noted with interest that several presenters indicated they had once strongly opposed debt adjustment legislation but, in view of the number of farm families being forced to leave their land, now saw no feasible alternative. It seems likely that support for debt adjustment will continue to grow as more and more farm families leave their farms.

Farmland Trust

A variety of proposals to establish some form of farmland trust were received during the public hearings. Members of the Task Force recognize that the concept is very controversial, but they also feel that this should not prevent study, discussion and debate, which may overcome perceived shortcomings of a similar proposal introduced in Saskatchewan. It was widely felt that if these shortcomings could be overcome, the concept could be adapted to address many of the short- and long-term problems discussed at public hearings.[40]

Under one possible farmland trust proposal, producers could restructure their debt by selling part or all of their farm's assets to the Trust and leasing back the assets under a long-term lease agreement. Farm families would give up part or full ownership of their operations, but the Trust would allow them to stay on their farms and exercise management of the farmland, equipment, livestock and other assets. Naturally, no farm family would be forced to sell their assets, and any family or individual could choose the amount of assets they wished to own or lease, depending on their financial circumstances.

It bears mention that the Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation (AADC) currently has authority to acquire, hold and dispose of farmland under Section 19(1) of the *Agricultural Development Act* and now administers over 560 quarter sections of land.[41] To many producers, therefore, the AADC exhibits many of the disadvantages often associated with government ownership of land without providing any of the benefits that a farmland trust could offer. A farmland trust would require strong support from governments to provide appropriate legislation, financial guarantees and considerable development capital.

As well as alleviating some of the immediate financial problems farm families now face, a farmland trust could address the longer-term problem that every farm is now purchased over and over by successive generations of farmers including, as many producers sadly observed, interest on the purchase price. A farmland trust administered by an arm of government could also prevent the purchase of excessive amounts of land by large corporations intent on gaining control of certain sectors of the industry.

A farmland trust could also help halt the degradation of agricultural land. After completing an official inventory of fragile or marginal land in Alberta, a farmland trust could provide the means to remove sensitive land from cultivation at no cost to individual farmers and thereby help preserve a valuable resource and heritage for future generations.

In addition, the Trust could provide an equitable mechanism to reduce crop production during times of low demand or low prices and could serve as a valuable bargaining point in attempts to encourage other countries to reduce their surplus crop production.

However, many producers expressed strong objections to any suggestion that government be involved, even remotely, in acquiring and administering land and other assets. Members of the Task Force recognize the great diversity of opinion on the subject and hope that a reasoned and informed debate will develop and that the relative advantages and disadvantages of this and other proposals can be discussed calmly and dispassionately.

Subsidies, Insurance and Stabilization

Agriculture is unlike many other sectors of the economy. Not only is the industry greatly affected by volatile world markets, but it is also prone to large variations in weather and the severity of disease and pest attack. Consequently, agricultural producers must contend with spectacular and unpredictable changes in both yield and price.

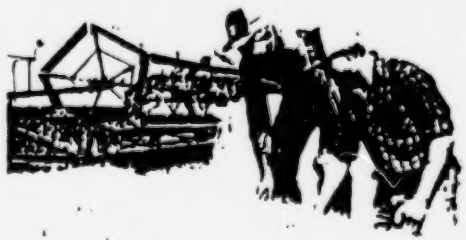
This has prompted successive governments to institute crop insurance programs to protect producers from decreases in crop yield, and stabilization programs to protect them against inadequate prices. In addition, governments have from time to time made up the difference (or deficiency) between a target price and the price producers receive on the open market.

The Task Force heard a wide variety of opinions on this issue. Some presenters objected to any attempts by government to reduce fluctuations, while others complained that existing programs do not go far enough. Most agreed that some programs were necessary, but differed on how much stability should be provided, and at what cost. In addition, there was considerable discussion of how particular programs could be made less costly, more fair or more helpful to all producers.

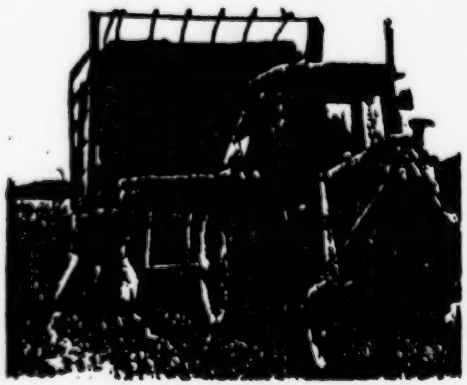
There are many methods of distributing deficiency and stabilization payments. Past government programs, the Task Force heard, have benefitted initially the very large-scale producers. This is widely seen to be unfair to smaller-scale producers and to exacerbate the disturbing trend toward larger farms and fewer healthy rural communities. This led several people to advocate strict ceilings on the amount of money paid to any producer or farm family from government programs, to ensure the bulk of any payment does not go to the largest producers.

Several producers told the Task Force that much of the money paid to producers as fertilizer, fuel or other subsidies finds its way all too quickly into the hands of manufacturers, distributors or processors

19
Options



"Anyone that doesn't understand that some level of government owns that land in the first place must be dreaming in technicolor. Just don't pay your taxes for a couple years and see who really owns the farm."
— Fairview



and so does not provide much real benefit to producers.

Income insurance was presented as a more sensible way of providing support for family farms. Under this system, payments are made on the basis of family income, rather than on the basis of commodity production. The Income Insurance Plan introduced in British Columbia in 1975 by the New Democrat government provides farm families with guaranteed returns based upon production costs negotiated annually with some producer organizations. It is a voluntary plan covering the most important products not under supply management programs.

Income insurance has done away with many *ad hoc* programs, and has enjoyed wide support from producers, who have remained economically efficient. These factors lead members of the Task Force to suggest that this plan be studied further to see if it would be feasible in Alberta.

The method for paying the Crow Rate Benefit was discussed at several public hearings. This issue, like that of variable rail rates, had obviously been discussed on many previous occasions, and most people confined their remarks to re-stating their conclusions without developing their arguments in detail. It seems likely, however, that the Alberta government's recent announcement that it supports a pilot scheme for paying the Crow Benefit to producers will bring this issue to the centre of attention once again.

Several changes were suggested to the beef stabilization plan to make it more responsive to the needs of cow-calf operators. In view of the availability of large quantities of feed grain and the prediction of a buoyant market for beef, several presenters advocated cancelling the $21/tonne Feed Grain Assistance Program.

Task Force members noted that many producers expressed intense frustration with important aspects of the provincial crop insurance program. Beekeepers in the south were disturbed that losses attributed to pesticide spraying had not yet been covered by the plan, whereas producers in the north and especially the Peace district scathingly attacked inadequate and expensive coverage. Members of the Task Force realize that producers generally reserved their most detailed comments for a crop insurance review panel which was touring the province at the same time, and they look forward to examining in detail the findings of this panel.

Marketing and Transportation

One strategy for improving farm income is to increase domestic consumption of locally-produced food. Members of the Alberta Cattle Commission explained their efforts to promote the sale of beef products in Canada by educating consumers, and ensuring attractive packaging and clear labelling. While recognizing the importance of domestic promotion, some warned that it should be sufficiently general so as not to increase the consumption of one commodity at the the expense of decreasing consumption of other domestic products. Many people expressed their strong support for the **Better Buy Alberta** campaign.

Encouraging greater food self-sufficiency was advanced several times as a viable strategy for ensuring the economic survival of Alberta producers and providing guaranteed supplies of healthy food during difficult economic times. Since producers in other countries can often produce these crops more cheaply, this would naturally lead to higher prices to domestic consumers. Some thought consumers could be persuaded to pay more for locally-produced food

if they were educated to recognize the importance of so doing, and if they could be assured that the extra money went primarily to producers rather than processors. Others found this unrealistic, and suggested import restrictions or levies are needed if domestic food producers are to compete successfully in their own market.

Marketing Agencies

Some people felt that Albertans should not concern themselves with new marketing approaches until they had taken full advantage of existing market mechanisms.

There is great diversity in the types of marketing agencies in Alberta. Some, such as the Alberta Cattle Commission, provide mainly educational and promotional functions. Others, such as the Alberta Vegetable Growers' Marketing Board, serve mainly to negotiate on behalf of producers for the terms and prices received for their product. The Alberta Hog Producers' Marketing Board and the Canadian Wheat Board are centralized selling boards, and have a monopoly over sales of farm products.

Other centralized selling boards, such as the Canadian Dairy Commission, have been given the power to control supplies through establishing production or marketing quotas, and in some cases, to determine the prices producers receive.[42]

Marketing agencies are producer-controlled, compulsory, horizontal marketing organizations which perform specific marketing operations on behalf of producers of agricultural commodities. They arose primarily because of instability in agricultural supply, prices and incomes, and were seen by producers to provide relief from these problems that could not be obtained from agricultural co-operatives.[43]

Depending on the powers that they have been given, marketing boards can maintain or increase producer incomes, ensure greater seasonal and annual farm price stability, promote greater volume of sales, and provide more equal distribution of benefits between producers. This can result in significant benefits to consumers by reducing fluctuations in price and supply, but may also increase the prices they pay. Production quotas can also limit the growth in farm scale and encourage regional self-sufficiency.

Central selling agencies provide producers the clout that is necessary to maintain and expand international markets. The Canadian Wheat Board, in particular, was frequently praised for fulfilling that role very successfully under extremely difficult circumstances, and several producers suggested canola, fine seeds and faba beans should be marketed under the Canadian Wheat Board, so that the same advantages could be enjoyed by producers of these crops.

One striking feature of discussions of marketing agencies at Task Force hearings was that, with few exceptions, producers of commodities not regulated under marketing boards were opposed to establishing new ones, while producers of commodities for which marketing agencies existed strongly supported them. Although some supporters acknowledged that high purchase costs of quotas could restrict entry into some sectors, dairy, egg and hog producers placed great emphasis on the ability of their boards to ensure the survival of small- and moderate-scale family farms by providing relative stability in what would otherwise be a volatile market. Supply management may not always be necessary to achieve these ends: hog producers, for example, indicated that single-desk selling alone has been an effective tool to offset the enormous power of some domestic processors.

A few presenters expressed the concern that the

21
Options

"Agriculture is the only industry I know that produces when there is no market."
— Stettler

"The parts of the agricultural industry that have supply management are the ones that are doing relatively well. So why does it horrify people when you mention supply management?"
— Smoky Lake

provincial government has not demonstrated a strong commitment to orderly marketing. They felt that the Marketing Council itself did not always pursue the best interests of producers' marketing agencies with sufficient enthusiasm. In addition, the Alberta government's involvement in the attempt to keep the old Prince Rupert Grain Terminal operational was seen to be a preliminary step by the government toward marketing grain outside of the Canadian Wheat Board, threatening a very successful part of our orderly marketing system.

International Trade

**"I like being Canadian. I really don't want to sell out to the United States."
— Red Deer**

The vast majority of presenters to the Task Force expressed strong reservations about attempts to obtain a free trade agreement with the United States. Many producers pointed out that a large majority of Canadian agricultural exports do not go to the U.S. and that there was a great risk of Canada's negotiators granting concessions in agriculture to obtain guaranteed access to U.S. markets in other sectors.

Many people also pointed out that many of our supply-managed sectors could easily be inundated with excess product if we were to abolish marketing agencies and attempt to compete directly with the industries of our much larger and more powerful neighbour.

**"I travel in the States a bit too; they haven't begun to grow cattle down there yet."
— Stettler**

By contrast, most cattle producers indicated strong support for the federal government's attempt to obtain a bilateral trading agreement with the United States. Since domestic demand for beef is not expected to increase, since the strong U.S. dollar helps prevent U.S. beef from entering our market, and since current trade closely approximates free trade, several producers expressed the expectation that an even freer trade environment could only assist them in selling directly into the California market.

However, even these producers expressed some nervousness about strong American protectionist sentiments, in light of the large positive trade balance Canada currently enjoys with the United States, and some producers suggested it is only a question of time before Canadian stabilization plans and subsidies come under attack by U.S. producers anxious to impose countervailing duties on Alberta beef.

Most people agreed we must work co-operatively to expand and diversify our international markets. Some suggested we should concentrate on exporting to Third World countries, although others warned this might severely hurt these countries' own economic development. Purchasing more products from the Soviet Union and other importing countries was suggested as a practical way to maintain and expand existing foreign markets, and the excess capacity in oilseeds and other crops could be alleviated by small-scale processing agreements with other countries.

There was general agreement that expanding domestic storage facilities is a necessary step toward pursuing any of these diverse export opportunities.

The effects on Alberta producers of the trade war between the United States and the European Community were discussed at most of the public hearings. Several approaches for Canada were suggested, ranging from increasing emergency food aid to lesser developed countries, to matching subsidies dollar for dollar, to independently pursuing international agreements with one side or the other, to making a strong case at the up-coming GATT talks.

Although most presenters recognized the importance of solving the trade dispute, most seemed to

feel that it is, above all, essential for Alberta to act quickly to address the effects of the dispute here at home. Unless this is done, solving the broader issue could prove to be academic for many producers.

Transportation

Transportation is a vital part of marketing Alberta's agricultural products, and members of the Task Force were somewhat surprised at an apparent reluctance by some producers to enter into discusson on transportation issues. This may have, in part, resulted from the feeling of these producers that the heated Crow debate had covered many of the relevant arguments.

Several producers decried branch-line closures, which threaten the existence of smaller communities and the surrounding family farms. In the Peace River district, however, several producers pointed out that they did not face similar branch-line closures, because they had never had an adequate rail network in the first place. They suggested a rail link between Beaverlodge and Tumbler Ridge, B.C., to enable Peace district producers better access to export markets.

Members of the Task Force noted with interest a recent application by several grain companies to reduce rates on certain shipments from specified points on existing rail lines. It seems likely that these variable rates could profoundly affect the economic well-being of moderate-sized family farms, existing rail lines, rural elevators, and rural communities. Task Force members hope that these and related issues will be discussed extensively in the near future.

Secondary Industry

The meat-packing industry was discussed at several venues, with most comments touching on the then-continuing labour/management dispute at the Gainers' plant in Edmonton.

Several briefs suggested producers of various commodities follow the lead of the Alberta Pork Producers' Marketing Board and establish a co-operative or producer-controlled processing plant, which would provide producers with a good understanding of the market they serve, and could give them more leverage in the marketplace against large and powerful processing companies.

On several occasions, it was suggested that vertical integration is so advantageous that producer check-offs should be used to purchase packing plants rather than to increase promotion efforts. Several producers said that sound stabilization plans or marketing agencies ensured reliable supplies and thereby encouraged secondary processing.

Many producers lamented the decline of Alberta's meat-packing industry, blaming this decline on freight rates and subsidies which favour eastern producers, the long distances to adequate markets, and the buying practices of large retail firms, which discourage local processing.

Several people suggested that the provincial government could do more to encourage secondary industry. However, awarding provincial subsidies to only one canola-crushing plant was seen by several people to be unfair to the operators of other Alberta plants.

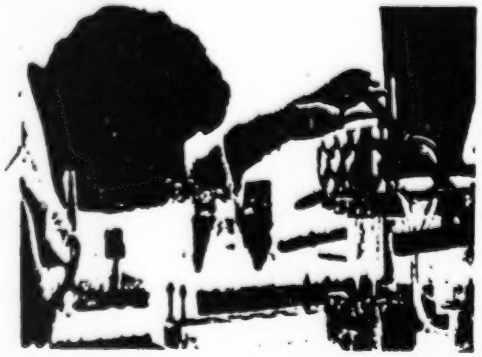
Agricultural Research

Several presenters expressed a strong feeling that research cannot and should not be viewed in isolation, but must instead be viewed in the context of current political and economic trends. For example, research focussing on increasing crop yields may be

23
Options

"We in the Peace don't have branch lines to close!"
— Grande Prairie

"The money is in the processing — it's the same with any product."
— Smoky Lake



counter-productive if greater yields result in increased soil degradation, environmental problems and decreases in rural population.

These concerns indicate the need for greater participation by governments in developing long-range goals for agricultural research and ensuring these goals are met. The perceived trend of governments to rely more on private companies to conduct research was viewed with alarm. Companies undertake research on a limited range of crop varieties and species, in order to promote their own products, and this research may not be in the best interests of all Albertans. It was pointed out during the public hearings that some of the best biotechnology research is now conducted by private companies in the U.S., and that the main beneficiaries of this research would likely be neither producers nor consumers, but the companies who develop the techniques and supply the inputs.

More research seems needed to develop techniques with which producers could reduce their dependence on costly agricultural inputs while maintaining their level of income. Several people suggested more research is needed to develop more frost-resistant grain varieties and to refine methods for incorporating clover and other plants that do not require nitrogen fertilizer into current agricultural practice. Other identified research priorities included perennial wheats, early-maturing milling wheat and biological control of grasshoppers and other pests.

Several people pointed out the irony that the Alberta government was considering cancelling the hail suppression research program, which many believe decreases crop losses, at the same time that a provincial review panel was considering ways to make the crop insurance program serve Alberta's producers better. The Alberta government has since cancelled this research program, thereby underlining the need to assess research projects on the basis of a long-term strategy rather than short-term political expediency.

Family Life

The effects of the current economic situation on the social well-being of rural Albertans are extremely important, but the extent of these problems may not be adequately appreciated.

Farm families in financial difficulty face extreme stress which may result in marital problems, emotional or physical illness, family violence, and in extreme cases, even suicide. Families who are not in financial difficulty experience stress as well, as they watch their friends and neighbours forced off their land and out of the area.

Some support services do exist, but the general feeling expressed to the Task Force was that these services are not sufficient for those most in need. Even the lack of private telephone lines was seen to limit the utility of many programs.

Many presenters emphasized that social problems in rural areas could best be alleviated by a strong commitment to preserving family farms and rural communities. For example, the emotional stress of losing one's farm and of losing friends and neighbours would naturally be greatly reduced if farm families in financial difficulty could stay on their land. Similarly, feelings of devastation and isolation would diminish if small rural communities were preserved.

The Task Force recognizes that it is not sufficient simply to address the social symptoms of the declining quality of rural life. There are real economic and

political reasons for this decline, and these structural problems must be identified and solved. However, there is a perceived need to immediately initiate services that would directly improve the quality of life for rural Albertans.

For example, providing rural child-care programs would not solve the financial crisis, but many presenters were convinced that a properly-designed child-care program is a high priority, and that it would greatly improve the quality of life for farm families, and women in particular. Such a program would require government support, and would have to be community-based and flexible enough to provide assistance during peak periods of farm work. Some people suggested mobile child-care facilities, while others suggested that both young and old members of the community could be employed to provide child-care, with funding coming from a national child-care allowance.

It was emphasized that there must be greater recognition of the role played by rural women in Alberta. Women are not only expected to do nearly all of the cooking and domestic chores, but also to care for children, to work in the fields, and often to serve as farm financial managers. In addition, it was pointed out, many farm families survive the current financial crisis only because of women's off-farm income and their efforts to diversify into non-traditional crops and services, such as guest ranches and cottage industries.

Many men and women told the Task Force of the importance of electing more women to boards of agricultural groups. Women do not even receive the same property rights at men, and are sometimes discriminated against by existing taxation laws, credit practices and membership criteria. Some suggested farm women be made eligible for the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and covered by Workers Compensation programs. In general, it was stressed that the role of rural women in Alberta could be improved substantially.

Land and Resource Use

Water management was discussed at several Task Force hearings, and particularly the need for careful planning and assessment of overall benefits and costs to the public of proposed development schemes. For example, one proposal for expanded irrigation facilities was roundly criticized because it was felt the potential value of agricultural crops and economic development in the area would never justify the enormous public expenditure required for initial development.

For the same reasons, continued construction of the Old Man Dam was seen as unwarranted, with some even suggesting that the dam's main function would not be to supply water for irrigation, but instead to provide the United States with a cheap supply of water.

The difficulties of assessing the costs and benefits of land development were also discussed. In particular, most presenters agreed that clearing and developing new agricultural land in northern Alberta should either be limited to areas close to established farms or else be postponed, at least until agricultural commodity prices increase.

The serious problem of soil degradation in Alberta was discussed at some length. It was generally agreed that techniques exist for preventing soil salinization and erosion, and that most producers have reasonable knowledge of these techniques. What seems to be lacking is the political will to make it economically feasible for individual producers to

25
Options

"I hadn't yelled at my wife until the last two years. This is what farming brought us to."
— Drayton Valley

"Farm women are vital contributors to Canadian society, but they remain invisible, unrecognized and economically disadvantaged."
— Medicine Hat

adopt these techniques. Unfortunately, many producers feel they are forced by the current economic conditions to adopt farming methods they know to be environmentally unsound.

There were also indications that some money supplied by governments to prevent soil degradation has been diverted for other purposes.

Presenters stated clearly that urban and rural Albertans alike must accept greater responsibility for the protection of our province's land base for the benefit of future generations.

"We're mining the soil to provide cheap food."
— Boyle

A number of presenters suggested that measures to protect Alberta's land base could complement a program to adjust crop production in the face of international surpluses. These people suggested Alberta's agricultural land be surveyed, and that land identified as easily erodible or otherwise marginal for crop production be placed in a farmland trust to be seeded to clover and other soil-enriching crops, and leased back to producers on extended leases as community pastures, wildlife preserves, or private recreation or grazing land. This would allow producers to remove land from crop production on a voluntary basis without suffering financially for so doing. It would also provide a means of protecting sensitive land for the use and enjoyment of future Albertans.

"We would gladly give a fifth of our place a rest if we could get a better price for our wheat."
— Vegreville

Several presenters indicated that land degradation as a result of oil and gas extraction in agricultural areas could be controlled better by transferring the authority for regulating such extraction from the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) to a newly-established Agricultural Resources Conservation Board. Such a board could help producers negotiate with developers of underground resources, and thereby reduce the social and environmental costs of such development.

The use of pesticides and herbicides was discussed at several public hearings. It is, of course, possible that fewer of these chemicals will be used in the near future, because of their increasingly high cost, and this may have a beneficial effect on the surrounding environment and the quality of food. However, it was generally felt that there is a need for much more research and education on the dangers of agricultural chemicals.

One presenter advocated the spraying of the chemical Methoxychlor to attempt to control blackfly populations in cattle-raising areas. In the south, there was considerable discussion about the pesticide Furadan killing large numbers of honeybee colonies. These issues again highlighted the need for governments to consider and weigh carefully the many complex costs and benefits associated with current agricultural practice, and to consider encouraging alternative practices where appropriate.

Rural-Urban Co-operation

Members of the Task Force were gratified to participate in extensive discussions between rural and urban Albertans. We feel that such discussions are essential for building a greater understanding between Albertans.

Unfortunately, in spite of the excellent efforts of several organizations, there still exists a substantial rift between rural and urban residents. Several presenters remarked that urban citizens do not have a great enough appreciation for the plight of rural Albertans. In general urban dwellers feel that the need to work long, hard hours is more than offset by the great degree of independence and self-sufficiency enjoyed by farmers. As a result, financial assistance for farmers is often viewed not as an attempt to

reduce economic inequities, but rather as a subsidy paid to a vocal minority so that they may maintain their apparently attractive way of life.

Not surprisingly, members of the rural community are quick to reply that this independence is largely illusory. Producers have little control over what crops they grow and how they grow them, and they are subject to many risks: changes in the weather, in market conditions, in corporate and government policy. Many producers feel they are just a small cog in a huge food production machine, with few of the traditional benefits of rural life and little hope their situation will improve. From this viewpoint, it is not surprising that producers become bitter when they learn how little consumers pay for food, and how much they object to paying more.

The apparent rift between rural and urban Albertans is not caused solely by a lack of understanding on the part of urban people. It became clear to the Task Force that many rural Albertans do not appreciate the many problems faced by their urban cousins. Many rural presenters seemed to believe urban dwellers can choose between a wide variety of jobs which are neither stressful nor difficult, which involve only eight hours of work a day, and which provide generous incomes that enable urban Albertans to enjoy a great selection of inexpensive cultural, intellectual and sporting events. Urban dwellers are seen to have a wider social community, and to have access to excellent churches, schools and other facilities which provide their children with good prospects for the future.

Members of the urban communities are, of course, quick to point out that this view is also a myth. They also face a severe cost-price squeeze, since wages generally rise more slowly than the price of goods and services. Many feel forced to work with people they do not particularly like at jobs they do not enjoy; a shockingly high number suffer because they have no job at all. Many urban people feel that important human values are all but lost and they, too, have little hope that their situation will improve. They also perceive themselves to be small cogs in a large and complex system over which they have little or no control. It is not surprising that many urban Albertans resent suggestions that they should pay more for their food.

Task Force members were encouraged that many presenters recognized that a rift between rural and urban people is a major problem. Many people pointed out that it is unreasonable for urban dwellers to complain about government assistance for farmers while continuing to accept and press for low food prices. On the other hand, as several people indicated, it is just as unreasonable for rural dwellers to press for lower wages only to complain when workers attempt to stretch their food dollar by buying cheap imported food.

It is important for all Albertans to gain a greater appreciation of the problems faced by rural and urban dweller alike and to re-examine many of their opinions and preconceptions. Why do so many mistaken impressions persist? What is the result? Who benefits? Most people would agree that a greater balance between rural and urban population, power and influence would promote greater social equality and economic health in Alberta. Several people emphasized to the Task Force that every citizen has a duty to encourage this understanding and sense of co-operation.

Farm Group Co-operation

Many producers claimed that urban Albertans are frequently confused by rural issues, partly be-

27
Options

"Regardless of which farm organization we belong to or which political party we chose to vote for, we have to put that aside and join together."
— Grande Prairie

cause they receive different opinions and facts from an array of farm and commodity groups. This diversity of positions is neither unreasonable nor undesirable, but it is unfortunate that the Alberta government now appears to give preferential treatment to selected commodity groups, even though these groups are neither representative nor strictly democratic.

Many presenters felt strongly that the government should cease what are seen to be "divide and conquer" tactics. Instead, co-operation between commodity groups should be promoted by giving more assistance to existing general agricultural organizations. This co-operation is vital for the future health of the industry and for greater understanding between rural and urban Albertans.

29

Recommendations

Recommendations

"Right now the government has oil in their ears and they can't hear anything else."
— Manning

At virtually every public hearing, citizens of Alberta told members of the Task Force that we are not meeting many of our goals for agriculture. There is a crisis in the industry, and the situation seems likely to get much worse unless immediate action is taken.

Some presenters expressed considerable pessimism, feeling that farms will inevitably get larger and larger, and consequently many rural communities will simply disappear. Eventually, they told the Task Force, most Alberta farms will be owned and controlled by large corporations, and nothing can be done to stop this trend. In their view, since every policy is bound to fail, nothing should be attempted.

The Task Force flatly rejects this view. In fact, the Task Force believes, this all-too-common feeling of helplessness is itself a major impediment to positive change. If Albertans feel current trends are inevitable, no representative government will find the political will to do anything of substance to improve the situation, no matter how disturbing it may be.

Clearly, many problems are caused by factors largely beyond Alberta's control. However, it is also clear that a great deal can and should be done to improve the status of agriculture in Alberta.

Members of the Task Force strongly believe that every effort must be made to resist feelings of helplessness in the face of inevitable changes. They hope this report and the recommendations which follow will encourage Albertans to discuss existing problems in Alberta's agricultural sector and, more importantly, examine what practical steps are possible and how Albertans may improve their agricultural livelihood and way of life.

Addressing the Financial Crisis

Agriculture is important not only to farm families but also to rural communities, to the provincial economy, and to the lives of almost all Albertans. As a result, a crisis for agriculture is a crisis for Alberta.

Agricultural producers presently face the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. Families are leaving their farms in record numbers. There is good evidence that the economic conditions are unlikely to improve for several years. Members of the Task Force believe that if commodity prices continue to decline, it is nearly certain that hundreds more families will be forced from their land, and to urban centres in search of jobs. Given the depressed state of the economy generally, many of these displaced farmers will not be able to find work, putting even greater stress on Alberta's already over-strained social services.

In rural Alberta, many existing communities could simply disappear. Rural Albertans will be

forced to travel further to obtain adequate services, and the cost of education, power, roads, railroads and other services will be spread between fewer and fewer people.

Members of the Task Force believe that unless quick and decisive action is taken, the crisis in Alberta agriculture will spread quickly throughout the rural economy, threatening the well-being of every Albertan.

The Task Force therefore recommends that Alberta citizens and the Alberta government set as a top priority the goal of keeping families on their farms. Although it may be argued that this will be difficult and expensive, the Task Force believes the economic costs of not keeping farm families intact would certainly be much greater.

Farm Debt

The financial crisis cannot be solved immediately. However, the Task Force believes there are options which would relieve the immediate hardship and stress of high debt loads and interest payments.

The Task Force therefore recommends a suspension of foreclosures and forced liquidations in Alberta, with all cases being referred to an independent provincial Debt Mediation Board established to assist lenders and borrowers reach equitable financial arrangements. The Task Force also recommends the establishment of a provincial Debt Appeal Court with the authority to either order the adoption of the Debt Mediation Board's proposals, or to direct further negotiations take place. This mediation process would provide producers more protection than is offered by the federal review process. The Task Force also recommends that the federal government pass legislation enabling Alberta to extend the jurisdiction of its debt mediation process temporarily to apply not only to land, but also to farm machinery, equipment, grain and livestock.

In addition, the Task Force recognizes that the Farm Credit Stability Program (FCSP) is not adaquately protecting farmers from high interest payments, and therefore recommends that the interest rate for existing FCSP loans be reduced from 9% to 6%.

Alberta Farmland Trust

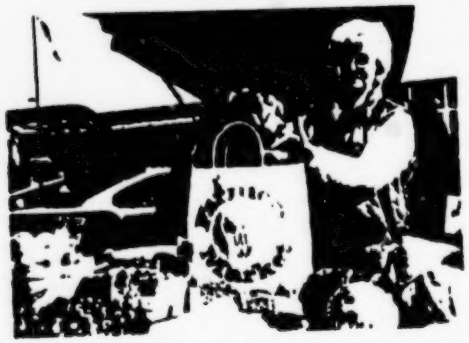
It is not widely known that the Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation (AADC) currently holds more than 560 quarter sections of Alberta farmland, almost all acquired through forced liquidations, foreclosures or quitclaims. As a result, the Alberta government through the AADC can be considered to preside over a *de facto* land bank.

Unfortunately, the current system exhibits important disadvantages but few of the many possible advantages of a land-banking system. When AADC acquires control of a farm, everyone loses: Alberta taxpayers, AADC, the farm family involved, and the rural community. AADC and the Alberta taxpayer lose because they are forced to pay for what is essentially a debt write-down; AADC generally acquires land because its value has plummeted. The family involved is, of course, forced to leave their farm and way of life, while surrounding farmers and community members lose a neighbour and a valuable link in the rural economy. Occasionally, a new farmer can afford to take advantage of the write-down by purchasing the abandoned or repossessed farm, but in many cases no new purchaser can be found and AADC is forced to spend even more money to maintain farm buildings and to prevent the fields from going to weeds.

31
Recommendations

"Speculation on farm land is a pressure that must be removed."
— Grande Prairie

32
Recommendations



"If the number of farms decreases much more, we might as well start putting school teachers on the school buses!" — Manning

The Task Force recommends that land acquired by AADC be transferred to an **Alberta Farmland Trust**. This voluntary farmland trust would be established for a specified period to enable farm families in financial difficulty to sell their farm and lease it back on a long-term lease.

A farm family which chose to sell some of their assets to the Trust would receive a portion of the value of the property, with the remaining value being received as shares in the Trust. The plan could also allow any farm family or individual to re-purchase any or all of the assets they had previously sold to the Trust. Thus, producers could adjust their ownership in farm assets in relation to their relative ability to afford ownership and absorb financial risk. This plan would likely be most attractive to producers who are experiencing shortfalls in cash flow and who need to compensate for declining asset values. For many of these farmers, giving up full ownership of their farm would be preferable to giving up farming altogether. It would also likely prove attractive for retiring farmers finding it difficult to sell their farms, and to beginning farmers finding it difficult to enter the industry.

Financial institutions would also find aspects of this plan attractive since they would have options for administering high risk loans they may now wish to carry and for disposing of repossessed properties.

As international markets become even more competitive, the Alberta Farmland Trust could also provide a means of protecting Alberta's land heritage by providing participating farmers an incentive to remove marginal land or land highly susceptible to degradation from agricultural production in an organized manner. Task Force members recognize that considerable study would be required to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all family farmers — whether or not they choose to become part of the trust.

Improving the Farm Economy

It is clear that the European Community, the United States and other countries will continue to offer large export subsidies to their grain producers, further increasing supplies and depressing already low prices. The Task Force strongly recommends that the federal government make deficiency payments to producers related to the actual cost of production, until a solution to the international grain trade war is developed. The Task Force urges that such payments be targetted carefully to assist farm families, and that they not be made primarily on the basis of acreage or commodity value.

The Task Force recommends that programs be instituted to prevent future escalation of land prices, and that these programs, too, focus on maintaining moderate-sized family farms. Some initiatives include:

- restructuring tax laws to discourage land speculation;
- placing reasonable limits on all existing assistance programs, and aiming future programs at farm families rather than at commodities or geographic areas;
- ensuring credit security regulations are restricted;
- helping develop model land rental agreements;
- establishing a provincial Land Commission with the authority to create Agricultural Land Reserves which could only be used for agricultural production.

The Task Force recommends the development of

a range of co-operative enterprises to fulfill community-based social and economic needs. The Task Force believes that equipment, supply, community service, employment, processing and other co-operatives can provide an important means of local control, retention of profits and local and regional economic stability.

The Task Force recommends that the Alberta Union of Rural Electrification Associations receive strong support in its efforts to prevent further sale of Rural Electrification Associations to private utility companies. The Task Force strongly supports the concept of supplying electricity to agricultural users at cost and believes this goal will be achieved in the short term only if REAs remain viable and united. In the long term, the Task Force recommends that Alberta work towards public or user ownership of power distribution networks.

The Task Force recommends an investigation be made of the British Columbia Income Insurance Program, which guarantees producers a negotiated cost of production (or parity price) for the goods they produce. The Task Force believes this plan could be adapted to serve Alberta producers and consumers alike.

Marketing and Transportation

The Task Force is alarmed by recent efforts to de-regulate Canada's transportation industry. In particular, the Task Force opposes the introduction of variable rail rates across the prairies. It also opposes recent moves to pay the Crow Benefit to Alberta producers on a trial basis. Members of the Task Force strongly believe that both these initiatives would seriously threaten the country elevator system, branch rail lines, and the continued existence of remote rural communities, and would discriminate against small- and moderate-sized family farms.

The Task Force believes the current bilateral trade negotiations with the United States threaten the existence of marketing agencies, stabilization and other programs that are essential for maintaining viable family farms in Alberta. Consequently, the Task Force strongly recommends that maintenance of these programs be a prerequisite for any trade agreement with the United States. In addition, the Task Force recommends much greater emphasis be placed upon the pursuit of multilateral agreements in general, and upon resolving the international grain war in particular.

Members of the Task Force strongly support the concept of agricultural marketing agencies to provide stability and fairness for both producers and consumers. The Task Force therefore recommends provincial and federal governments facilitate the establishment of marketing agencies for crops not currently subject to orderly marketing systems, if that is the wish of the majority of producers of these crops. In particular, in light of the continuing 'boom and bust' cycles in the cattle industry, the Task Force recommends cattle producers be encouraged to conduct a plebiscite on the advisability of establishing a cattle marketing agency based on the single-desk-selling concept that has proven so successful for hog producers.

Agricultural Research

The Task Force believes strongly that governments should increase their financial commitment to agricultural research. For the long-term well-being of Albertans, the central aim of future research should be to improve the social and economic well-being of moderate-scale family farms.

33
Recommendations

34
Recommendations

One immediate aim of research and demonstration projects should be to improve the economic viability of family farms by reducing the need for chemical fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides and other similar expensive inputs.

In light of the fact that many past research programs have had exactly the opposite effect, the Task Force recommends that funding arrangements which may continue the current trend toward increased reliance on farm chemicals be viewed with extreme caution.

Rural Family Life

The Task Force recommends the establishment of a toll-free telephone line to offer crisis management, stress reduction, family counselling and other services. It also recommends that a strong rural communications network be developed through such means as a quarterly newsletter, to reduce the sense of isolation among farmers in general and farm women in particular.

The Task Force also recommends a study be conducted of possible assistance for neighbour, mobile or community child-care programs, and programs to assist families with routine chores during peak periods of farm activity.

Further Discussion

The Task Force recommends that general farm organizations receive strong support for co-ordinating the efforts of diverse commodity groups and for promoting greater understanding among these groups and between members of rural and urban communities. Particular commodity groups should be actively encouraged to become more representative and democratic.

Finally, the Task Force believes that continued discussion of the issues raised in this report as well as many other issues is needed. Considerable effort should be expended to account for diverse opinions and philosophical approaches. It is the hope of the Task Force that the strategies that emerge and which gain most favour will address not only the current crisis, but also the long-term economic and social well-being of all Albertans.

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36
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Public Hearings

Public Hearing	Date	Public Hearing	Date
Barrhead	Friday, November 14, 1986	Manning	Wednesday, November 12, 1986
Boyle	Thursday, November 13, 1986	Medicine Hat	Tuesday, October 28, 1986
Brooks	Tuesday, October 28, 1986	Olds	Thursday, October 30, 1986
Calgary	Wednesday, October 29, 1986	Pincher Creek	Monday, October 27, 1986
Camrose	Thursday, November 6, 1986	Red Deer	Thursday, October 30, 1986
Drayton Valley	Thursday, November 6, 1986	Smoky Lake	Tuesday, November 4, 1986
Edmonton	Wednesday, November 5, 1986	St. Paul	Tuesday, November 4, 1986
Fairview	Wednesday, November 12, 1986	Stettler	Friday, October 31, 1986
Grande Prairie	Tuesday, November 11, 1986	Vegreville	Monday, November 3, 1986
Lethbridge	Monday, October 27, 1986	Vermilion	Monday, November 3, 1986

Presentations Received from Individuals

Name	Public Hearing	Name	Public Hearing
Jim Allan	Fairview	Bud Crosbie	Olds
Hubert Anderson	Barrhead	Ray Danyluk	St. Paul
Randy Archibald	Camrose	Howard Davis	Pincher Creek
Martin Ashmead**	Boyle	Roy Dennis	Brooks
Jerry Basisty	Fairview	Dick de Vries	Camrose
Jim Baugh	Stettler	Peter Dole	Fairview
Karl Benson	Camrose	Noel Downham	Smoky Lake
Dave Benson	Camrose	Norman Dunn	Drayton Valley
Grant Bergman	Vermilion	Ernst Eichelbaum	Medicine Hat
Margaret Blanchard	Medicine Hat	Peter Eichelbaum	Medicine Hat
Art Brevig	Vermilion	Joan Elmont	Drayton Valley
Bob Carlyle**	Red Deer	Charles Evaskevich	Grande Prairie
Victor Chrapko	Edmonton	Henry Eyben	Vermilion
Leo Coderre	Red Deer	Harley Fried	Vegreville
Mike Cooper	Pincher Creek	Joseph G. Gendre, Jr.**	Stettler
Arlie Corbett	Barrhead	Don Gibbs	Fairview
Merv Cradduck	Lethbridge	Rita Graumans	Medicine Hat

38
Public Hearings

Name	Public Hearing
Dale Greig	Barrhead
Jim Gurnett*	
Hubert Heier	Stettler
Ann Hemmingway	Fairview
Eugene Henning	Lethbridge
Gerald Hutchinson	Drayton Valley
Garry Jones	Olds
John de Jong	Brooks
Ted de Jong	Brooks
Stan Kamieniecki	Manning
Barbara Klymchuk**	Vegreville
Fritz Kohler	Barrhead
Peter Kulyna	Manning
Reginald LaMothe	St. Paul
Clarence Lacombe	Red Deer
Lars Larson	Drayton Valley
Bill Lindsay	Edmonton
Harry Little	Camrose
Ed Matwichuk	Edmonton
Pat McCarthy	Camrose
Ed Hirch**	Medicine Hat
Charles Navratil	Barrhead
Mark Neilson	Stettler
Lawrence Nicholson	Medicine Hat
Russ Nielsen	Camrose
Peter Nowakowsky**	Barrhead
Robin Ohman	Stettler
Dennis Peterson	Brooks
Albert Pimm	Fairview
Janice Pitman**	Boyle
Joan Puckett**	Lethbridge
Richard Quintin	Calgary
Peter Reese	Manning
Harry Reinders	Manning
Ken Robins**	Stettler
Dr. Don Ronaghan	Vegreville
John Ross	Stettler
Richard Scoffom	Smoky Lake
Dave Sheppard	Pincher Creek
Ted Shipley	Pincher Creek
Jean Sloan**	Vermilion
Tom Starosielski	St. Paul
Bill Stephen	Lethbridge
Annette Stevens*	
Ray Stone	Vermilion
Ken Timanson	Vegreville
Rudolf Tipman	Stettler
Joe Tipman	Stettler
Greg Tischer	Drayton Valley
Arthur Turner	Stettler
Wilf Ursulak	Vegreville
Floyd Van Slyke	Red Deer
John Voorhorst	Lethbridge
Albert Wagner	Red Deer
Janet Walter	Red Deer
Harold Wharton**	Barrhead
Wayne Whittaker	Manning
S. and O. Wiskel*	
Malcolm Wright*	
Ray Youngren	Red Deer

Presentations Received from Organizations

Organization	Represented by	Public Hearing
Alberta Beekeepers Association	Henk Dyk Stan Bastura	Brooks
Alberta Cattle Commission	Ilke Herrmann Gladys Wacowich	Boyle

39
Public Hearings

Organization	Represented by	Public Hearing
Alberta Cattle Commission**	Karl Schneider	Vegreville
Alberta Cattle Commission**	Len Vogelaar	Pincher Creek
Alberta Chamber of Commerce**	Reuben Hamm Dick Parr	Edmonton
Alberta Cow-Calf Association	Alvin Bugeja Harvey Aarbo	St. Paul
Alberta Egg and Fowl Marketing Board**	Don Cook Warren Chorney	Edmonton
Alberta Fresh Vegetable Marketing Board	Reuben Huber	Brooks
Alberta Fresh Vegetable Marketing Board	Jim Hole	Edmonton
Alberta Hatching Egg Marketing Board*	W. J. Landreth	
Alberta Horticulture Association	Marilyn McArthur	Red Deer
Alberta New Democrats, Women's Section**	Viola Braun-Fox Starr Curry Janet Laddish	Edmonton
Alberta Pork Producers Marketing Board**	Roy Barrett Victor Chrapko Ed Schultz	Edmonton
Alberta Weather Modification Co-operative**	J. Bishop	Olds
Alberta Wheat Pool**	Ray Schmitt Peggy Le Sueur-Brymer	Calgary
Alberta Wilderness Association*	Vivian Pharis	
Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement Agriculture Association	Joe Blyan Gordon Bourque	Boyle
Canadian Wheat Board Advisory Committee**	Clarence Thurston	Manning
Central Peace Finance Committee	Harry Zuk	Grande Prairie
Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta**	John Kolkman Al DeBoer	Edmonton
City of Lethbridge and County of Warner Agricultural Services Board*	Don M. LeBaron Robert A. Grbavac	

40
Public Hearings

Organization	Represented by	Public Hearing
Council of Alberta Rural Ratepayers Association	Neil Deck	Vegreville
County of Two Hills No. 21 Agricultural Services Board**	John Bidulock	Vegreville
Dryland Salinity Control Association	William Norris	Lethbridge
Edmonton Social Planning Council	Peter Faid	Edmonton
Elk Point Surface Rights Commission**	Leslie Keith Alvin Bugeja	St. Paul
Family Farm Foundation of Canada	Gordon MacMurchy	Calgary
Federated Co-operatives Limited*		
Flax Growers of Western Canada	Russell Smith	Brooks
Government of Manitoba*	Bill Uruski Minister of Agriculture	
Government of Manitoba*	Jay Cowan Minister of Co-operative Development	
Government of Manitoba*	Eugene Kostyra Minister of Finance	
Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce**	Gerald Vreeling	Grande Prairie
National Farmers Union	Ted Pitman Ralph Spence	Boyle
National Farmers Union Region 8, District 1**	Steve Cailliau, Margaret Dyck, Norman Dyck, Jane Farney, Art Macklin, Frank Stevenson, Allen Watson	Grande Prairie
National Farmers Union, Region 7**	Irene McLerie	St. Paul
National Farmers Union, Region 7**	John Oberg Laurent St. Denis	Edmonton
National Farmers Union, Region 7, District 7**	Dale Fankhanel George Calvin	Camrose
Newfoundland and Labrador New Democrats*	Peter Fenwick, Provincial Leader	

Organization	Represented by	Public Hearing
Olds College**	Dr. Robert A. Bigsby Dr. Bohdan Chomiak	Olds
Region 6 Action Committee**	Ben Smashnuk	Grande Prairie
South MacLeod Water Users' Association**	George J. Gaschler	Lethbridge
Sustainable Agriculture Association	Elizabeth Sunridge	Medicine Hat
Town of Stettler	Bob Stewart, Mayor	Stettler
Town of Taber	George Meyer, Mayor	Medicine Hat
Town of Vegreville	Ross Cairns, Mayor	Vegreville
Town of Vermilion	David Hughes, Mayor	Vermilion
Unifarm**	Ralph Jesperson	Edmonton
Unifarm**	Hartmann Nagel	Grande Prairie
Unifarm, Region 3**	Dave Felstad Charles Navratil	Boyle
University of Alberta, Department of Genetics**	Dr. David Nash	Edmonton
University of Alberta, Department of Soil Science*	Dr. J. A. Robertson	
University of Alberta, Department of Family Studies*	Dr. N. Keating	
University of Alberta*	G. A. Mumey	
Western Barley Growers Association*		
Women of Unifarm	Margaret Blanchard Rita Graumans	Medicine Hat
Women of Unifarm, Region 3**	Bev Morrow Charles Navratil	Barrhead

* indicates written brief only
** indicates written brief and oral presentation at public hearing

41
Public Hearings

42
Task Force Members

Chairperson:
Derek Fox, MLA
Vegreville

Derek Fox, 35, is the agriculture spokesperson for the New Democrat Official Opposition Caucus. He lives on a farm near Hairy Hill, Alberta, where he keeps bees and operates a small honey processing and distribution company.

Dobson Lea

Dobson Lea, 73, farms near Jarvie. He is a former president of both Unifarm and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, and served for four years on the Canadian Wheat Board Advisory Committee.

Rudy Kiist

Rudy Kiist, 41, is a Director of the Alberta Egg Marketing Board. He has extensive experience in grain production and marketing. Presently, he maintains a laying flock of 10,000 birds and runs a registered egg grading station.

Barbara Tiegs

Barbara Tiegs, 55, is a retired irrigation, dairy and vegetable farmer. She is a former director of Women of Unifarm, and served for nine years as a board member of the Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation. She lives in Brooks, Alberta.

Christie Mjolsness, MLA
Edmonton Calder

Christie Mjolsness, 31, was born and raised on a farm near Coronation, Alberta. She has taught elementary school at the County of Stettler, Jasper and Edmonton, where she now lives. Mjolsness is the social services spokesperson for the New Democrat Official Opposition caucus.

Gordon MacMurchy

Gordon MacMurchy, 61, is president of the Family Farm Foundation of Canada. MacMurchy was first elected a Member of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly in 1971, and served in the New Democrat government as Minister of Agriculture, Education, Continuing Education and Municipal Affairs. He lives in Semans, Saskatchewan.

Leo Piquette, MLA
Athabasca
Lac La Biche

Leo Piquette, 39, was born and raised on a farm near Plamondon, Alberta. He now runs the mixed grain and cattle operation. Piquette is the New Democrat Official Opposition spokesperson for transportation and native affairs.

Invited Guest:
Vic Althouse, MP
Humboldt-Lake Centre
Saskatchewan

Vic Althouse, 50, is the agriculture spokesperson for the federal New Democrat caucus. He is a founding commissioner of the Saskatchewan Hog Marketing Board, and a founding member of the National Farmers Union. Althouse divides his time between Ottawa and his farm near Kelvington, Saskatchewan.

Thanks to the following Task Force staff and volunteers:
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Alberta Democrat: pp. 23, 30
Canadian Federation of Agriculture: p. 42 (Dobson Lea)
Unifarm: p. 42 (Barbara Tiegs)

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